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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: REGIONAL AIRPORTS ON SCHEDULE TO ACHIEVE ICAO COMPLIANCE

1. (U) Summary: Embassy, MNF-I, and GOI representatives visited airports in Mosul, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah from September 16 thru 18 to assess the progress in achieving compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards and recommended practices (SARPS). While at different stages of completion, all three airports are on schedule in terms of construction and renovation work. We suspect that one reason for the accelerated development pace of the Erbil and Sulaymaniyah airports is that they are located in predominantly conflict-free Kurdish areas. End summary.

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Background  
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2 (U) Mosul, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah airports are undergoing construction and modifications in order to satisfy ICAO standards and recommended practices (SARPS). Mosul airport has approximately \$15 million of IRRF funds in construction projects, and MNF-I is transitioning control of the airport to Iraqi authorities. The Erbil and Sulaymaniyah airports are commercial, funded with regional money, and under Kurdish control.

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Mosul  
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3. (U) The target date for opening the Mosul airport is January 2006. The civil passenger terminal was ready for operation one year ago; however, it did not open at the time because Iraqi security forces and procedures were not ready. During the course of the following year, the condition of the terminal deteriorated due to insufficient maintenance, vandalism, and poor quality of construction. According to the Army Corps of Engineers (COE), it will cost approximately \$400,000 to bring the terminal back up to acceptable operating condition, and this work could take one to two months to accomplish.

4. (U) There is a new \$3 million, nine-story control tower being constructed and slated for completion in December of this year. On-the-job training for Iraqi air-traffic controllers will start in January 2006. According to COE, the quality of construction so far is good, and work is progressing according to schedule. The major unknown for tower construction at this point is who will handle the hook-up of the electrical power grid; the Ministry of Electricity (MoE) is responsible for coordinating this work, and MNF-I agreed to follow-up with the ministry.

5. (U) The airport has a 9,000 ft runway, which gives it the capability to handle most passenger airplanes currently in production. (Iraqi Airways aircraft are from the Boeing family -- models 727, 737, and 767 -- and have passenger capacities ranging from 150 to 250.) One shortcoming of the airport is that it does not have a parallel taxiway; airplanes would have to taxi back on the runway, holding up other aircraft from landing.

6. (U) Mosul airport will only serve as a domestic airport. This is due to constraints imposed by surrounding residential areas. International aircraft require clearance areas around the airport that cannot be met by Mosul's layout. There are plans to build a new regional international airport 30 km southwest of the existing airport that could service international flights.

7. (SBU) The group also met with an official of US Civil Military Operations, which is responsible for transitioning the airport from military to civilian control. The official stated that little has been done in private-sector transportation development, mainly due to the current run-down condition of the airport.

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Erbil  
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8. (U) Mr. Zaid M. Zwain, General Director of Erbil International Airport (EIA), told us that EIA is currently handling 30-45 domestic passenger flights per week. Mr. Zaid

predicts that a new airport that is under construction nearby could handle 10 million passengers annually by 2010. EIA is able to service international charter flights, and Mr. Zaid said that they have been in discussions to get a direct flight arranged between Frankfurt and Erbil. (Note: The first of these charter flights landed this week, confirming Mr. Zaid's statement.) The control tower at EIA is not up to ICAO standards; one glaring problem is the lack of unobstructed 360-degree visibility.

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Sulaymaniyah  
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9. (U) Sulaymaniyah airport (ORSU) construction was completed in July 2005 at a price of \$40 million plus, all of which the local government provided. ORSU currently handles two domestic Iraqi Airways flights per week, both originating in Amman and flying through Baghdad enroute to ORSU. There are currently no cargo flights. According to one airport official, the airport could handle up to 20 flights per day, and discussions are under way to add flights from Istanbul and Dubai (all flying through Baghdad). These flights could begin as soon as next week according to airport officials. ORSU would also like to service international flights directly. In order to do so, airport officials need to request certifications for immigration and customs from the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Finance, respectively. We believe that customs and security infrastructure is in good condition. DHS plans to send a TSA team to ORSU in late October to assist with any outstanding issues, such as CCTV installation.

10. (U) Officials stated that there are plans to build a second terminal in the future, once international flights are coming directly to ORSU in large numbers. The second terminal would be larger than the first and dedicated to international flights, while the current terminal would be dedicated to domestic flights. In addition, according to one of the airport officials, there are plans to build a new highway interchange near the airport in order to facilitate smoother traffic flow. Also, there are plans to build a five-star hotel on the road that leads directly into the airport compound.

11. (SBU) Comment: We suspect that one reason for the accelerated development pace of the Kurdish airports is that Mosul, a predominantly Sunni area, has been the site of much fighting and counter-insurgency activity. By comparison, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah are in predominantly conflict-free Kurdish areas. End comment.

Khalilzad